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Oppressive Energopolitics in Africa's Last Colony: Energy, Subjectivities, and Resistance

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Abstract: Focusing on energy developments and energy infrastructure in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, this article engages with the politics of energy and energy citizenship in situations of conflict, authoritarianism and settler colonialism. We contribute to the body of research on how energy infrastructure, including renewable energy infrastructure, furthers (neo)colonial social and political power imbalances. Using Dominic Boyer's concept of energopower, which allows us to explore how energy is used to govern populations and produce subjectivities, we argue that a colonial and oppressive energoregime will produce subjects hostile to itself. Putting colonised people's lived experiences and perceptions of an oppressive energy system centre stage, we further research on the interrelationship between energy infrastructure, citizenship and identity by showing how an energoregime can inadvertently foster a rejection of certain citizenships and national identities in favour of others. Our data are generated using ethnography and semi-structured interviews with Saharawis living in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara.

Keywords: Western Sahara, energopower, citizenship, renewable energy, energy colonialism

This article engages with the politics of energy in situations of conflict, authoritarianism and settler colonialism. While there is a body of research on how energy infrastructure, including renewable energy infrastructure, furthers (neo)colonial social and political power imbalances, there is little work on how colonised peoples subjectively perceive and experience such energy systems. As Loloum et al. (2021) point out, indigenous voices are often missing in energy debates. We further discussions on energy systems, colonisation and authoritarianism by focusing on the lived experiences and perceptions of the colonised Saharawi people towards the energy systems installed in their country, Western Sahara, which is

largely occupied and ruled by a foreign power, Morocco. We argue that, in such a situation of foreign military occupation, in which energy infrastructure is inextricably tangled with a colonial political regime, the energy system, or energoregime, produces subjects hostile to itself.

Western Sahara was a Spanish colony until 1975, when Spain sold it to neighbouring Morocco and Mauritania in return for continued access to the country's fisheries and a share of profits from the phosphates mine. Morocco claimed that, before Spanish colonisation, "Spanish Sahara" had belonged to the Kingdom of Morocco, a claim refuted by Saharawis and, in 1975, by the International Court of Justice. As Moroccan troops invaded, indigenous Saharawi civilians fled to refugee camps in neighbouring Algeria, where the Saharawi liberation movement the Polisario Front set up a state-in-exile, the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic. Some 180,000 Saharawi refugees remain there today.

Saharawis that could not flee in 1975 have spent the last 45 years under a Moroccan occupation. Human rights NGOs consider the occupied zone as among the worst places in the world in terms of political freedoms. Saharawis there are separated from Saharawis in the refugee camps by a Moroccan-built berm, which is the longest active military wall in the world. Polisario and Morocco were at war until 1991, when the UN brokered a ceasefire, promising a referendum on independence for the Saharawis. Morocco has blocked the referendum ever since and has meanwhile profited from Western Sahara's immense natural resources, including phosphates, fisheries, sand, agricultural products, renewable energy and oil exploration contracts. Polisario have repeatedly asked the UN to intervene to stop Morocco's exploitation of Western Sahara's resources. A 2002 UN Legal Opinion found that such exploitation without the consent of the Saharawis is illegal. Over the last five years, the High Court of England and Wales, the EU's Court of Justice in four separate rulings, and South Africa's High Court, have drawn the same conclusion as the UN.

Research on natural resource exploitation in Western Sahara (see especially Kingsbury 2015) and Saharawis themselves have long warned that continued exploitation would result in an end to the ceasefire. On 13 November 2020, these warnings proved valid: war resumed between Polisario and Morocco when the latter's army fired on Saharawi peaceful protesters on the Polisario-controlled side of the military wall, in a demilitarised buffer zone near Western Sahara's border with Mauritania. The Saharawi protesters had been resisting the export of "their" natural resources by mounting a roadblock. Energy, including renewable energy, deserves special consideration among the resources that have contributed to the antagonisms that have led to renewed war in Western Sahara. This is because energy exploitation bolsters the occupation in a way other types of resource exploitation does not: energy infrastructure (in the form of cables, distribution lines, submarine cables and so on) creates material links between Morocco, Western Sahara and other countries beyond; and (lack of) domestic energy affects Saharawi lives on an everyday basis.

Below, we first situate our research in the relevant literature and outline our methodology. Then, in three layers of analysis (international, local and personal), we argue that an oppressive, colonial energoregime will produce subjects hostile

to itself. Our second section is largely narrative, setting out for the reader the global energy landscape that extends from occupied Western Sahara. The remaining two sections draw on our fieldwork, showcasing Saharawi *perceptions* of the energoregime, their attempts to resist it, and the forms by which Saharawis come to be hostile towards it. Said perceptions are central to evidencing our argument concerning the relationship between subjectivities and the energoregime. These sections therefore rely on long quotations from interviews and ethnographic descriptions. The third section focuses on how the energoregime antagonises Saharawis at a local level, through unequal energy distribution, orchestrated power cuts and discrimination. The fourth section focuses on antagonisms created through the (threat of) violent oppression of Saharawis at an interpersonal level.

Researching Energy, Power, and Colonialism

Recent scholarship on energy and power highlights how energy mediates politics and power relations globally (see especially Luque-Ayala and Silver 2016). While in some contexts social movements push for emancipatory energy transitions (Angel 2017, 2021), there is a large body of research on less than progressive uses of energy infrastructure. Using the case of Mozambique, Kirshner et al. (2020) highlight how perceptions of energy landscapes reflect social relations of domination. Several scholars focusing on African cases argue that energy infrastructure is wielded by states to extend control over their populations, including by enlisting the latter in citizenship (Brew-Hammond 2010). Winther and Wilhite (2015) have argued that grid extension in rural Zanzibar provided the state with a mechanism for extending political control over the population. Using the case of Mozambique, Power and Kirshner (2019:504) understand electrical technologies and infrastructure as "political terrain". They argue that large scale electrical infrastructural developments are a way for the state to perform and narrate its own presence, as well as to enlist a state's citizens in projects of modernisation and development. More specifically, Power and Kirshner argue that electrification allows the state to enrol its citizens as bill-paying customers of neoliberal capitalist development. Lemanski's (2020) work on infrastructural citizenship finds that citizenship and identity are embedded in infrastructure, and that public infrastructure is a local representative of the state. Likewise, Baptista (2016) asserts that users' everyday interactions with electrical infrastructure elicits their critical positionality with regards to the state and thus to their condition as citizens.

Other studies focusing on Global Southern contexts highlight the colonial implications of such power politics. For example, Charis Enns and Brock Bersaglio (2020) argue that large infrastructure projects in East Africa are reproducing colonial legacies. Similarly, Power et al. (2016) argue that socially and spatially uneven energy infrastructural developments in Mozambique and South Africa are at risk of perpetuating a colonial electrical geography, given that they favour corporate and elite clients over households and communities. Energy developments are also contributing to settler colonial conflicts in settings as diverse as Mexico and occupied Palestine (Dunlap 2019; Howe and Boyer 2015; Jabary Salamanca 2011).

This Mexican case, in which corporate-led renewable energy developments encroach on indigenous communities' lives and land, highlights that so-called green energy is not always "clean" when it comes to human rights (Dunlap 2019). From the mining of rare earth materials for solar panels (Klinger 2017), livelihoods endangered by wind farms (Franquesa 2018), landgrabs to make way for biofuel plantations (Fairhead et al. 2013), climate change "solutions" too often rely on dispossession and violence, which Meredith DeBoom (2021) conceptualises as "climate necropolitics".

Our article builds on this literature on the colonial and state-led power politics of energy systems, but focuses on an area that has received less attention: how the colonised population experiences and perceives the energy system, and how this in turn influences their positionality towards it. We find the concept of an energoregime useful in pursuing such lines of thought. Boyer's (2017:197) concept of energopower is "an alternative genealogy of modern power" that "*rethinks political power through the twin analytics of electricity and fuel*". Just as Foucault's biopower is a productive force for subjugating bodies and controlling populations, an energopolitical analysis goes beyond the study of energy politics to explore how energy, fuel and electricity (are used to) govern populations and produce subjectivities. Rogers (2014) conceptualises an energopolitical regime as a political system in which energy companies join state agencies in moulding and transforming citizens. We explore how Saharawis experience the Moroccan energopolitical regime in their territory and, following Mitchell's (2013) lead in showing how social movements take advantage of the vulnerabilities of energy systems, demonstrate how the energopolitical regime inadvertently fosters a Saharawi nationalist conscience. Foucault (1978) argues that resistance is not exterior to power, that power and resistance are mutually constitutive. Applied to an energopolitical regime, and as Mitchell has argued, the flows, cables and pylons of electricity mediate power but also opportunities for resistance. Mitchell argues that fuel, specifically coal, offered political agency not due to subjective class consciousness or collective ideology but through the threat of sabotage and strike. With the turn to oil as a fuel, which required less workers and whose infrastructure was not as vulnerable to sabotage, opportunities for workers' agency disappeared. Saharawis, victims of labour market discrimination and a minority in their own country, likewise lack the tools of historic coal workers. Why and how, then, do they resist? We argue that colonial, oppressive energopolitical regimes foster antagonistic subjectivities that wish to resist the regime.

As well as arguing that Saharawis perceive the energy system as oppressive and colonial, we have also ourselves qualified the energoregime in occupied Western Sahara as "oppressive" and "colonial". In the first section of our paper we justify our qualification of the energoregime as "colonial". Our qualification of "oppressive" is justified throughout the article, although we define the term "oppression" here. Community psychologists find that oppression ensures "that the distribution of resources is unfairly allocated" (Palmer et al. 2019). Oppression also necessitates the existence of a privileged group, argues Cudd (2005:21). That is, another social group must privilege from the harm done to the oppressed group. Marquez (2016:234) suggests an authoritarian oppressive regime "is capable of

heinous actions, including torturing and killing". Zafirovski (2007:137) identifies an authoritarian, oppressive regime with "military-style discipline, brutality, and cruelty". While we are able to show, in our first section, that the oppression of one group brings privileges to another, demonstrating "brutality" or "cruelty" is more subjective. At the end of our third section, then, we make use of the ethnographic method of thick description in order to give the reader a sense of the cruelty, and climate of brutal violence, faced by Saharawis.

We follow an ethnographic methodology, coupled with the use of unstructured interviews. This allows us to focus on Saharawi *perceptions* of energy (regimes). Precisely by putting Saharawis' experiences and perceptions at the forefront, it is possible to see how a particular energopolitical regime produces certain subjectivities. Interviewees have been anonymised, including by changing their names in this text. This research is informed by a limited period of participant observation in occupied Western Sahara, August to September 2014, by Joanna Allan. The entirety of the fieldwork was conducted in "hiding" in one Saharawi household, which Moroccan police had under surveillance 24 hours a day. The ethical implications of this research are vast, complicated and deserving of in-depth discussion, which are discussed elsewhere (Allan 2017). The research is also based on Hamza Lakhal's, a Saharawi poet and researcher living in the occupied zone, and Mahmoud Lemaadel's, a Saharawi journalist and media activist, experiences of lifetimes facing the violence, risked and actual, of the Moroccan regime. Allan's experience as a volunteer with Western Sahara Resource Watch, which protests the illegal exploitation of Western Sahara's resources, has also informed this paper. The authors conducted 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and one focus group with Saharawis living in the occupied territory between 2018 and 2020.

The Energopolitical Regime's Exterior Ministry: Energy Colonialism, Diplomacy, and Foreign Corporate Allies

In 2015, British/Irish San Leon became the first company to drill for oil onshore Western Sahara. Oil companies have not (yet) found oil in commercial quantities. Since fossil fuels elude Morocco, the Kingdom is almost completely dependent on energy imports from Spain and Algeria. Morocco plans to achieve its much-desired energy self-sufficiency via renewable energy. It makes itself—and we wish to draw attention to the reflexive verb here—dependent on occupied Western Sahara. This reflects similar situations in other colonial contexts, for example, Gaza's ties to Israel via electrical and water infrastructure (Jabary Salamanca 2011). However, while Israel forces Gaza's dependence on itself through infrastructural violence, Morocco makes itself partially dependent on Western Sahara. Below, we analyse why Morocco orchestrates this dependence. We also explore the exterior links of the energopolitical regime in Western Sahara. We argue that energy does Morocco's diplomatic work and furthers Moroccan colonialism in Western Sahara in material and imaginary ways. In this way, (renewable) energy infrastructure in occupied Western Sahara is comparable to other large

infrastructural projects in Africa in which, as Enns and Bersaglio (2020) argue, reproduce colonial legacies.

Western Sahara is connected to the Moroccan grid via an interconnection in the capital El Aaiún. A 400kv power interconnection between El Aaiún and Dakhla city (also in Western Sahara) is in progress (RES4MED 2018:4). Morocco hopes that its grid will connect to the Mauritanian one via Dakhla city (ONEE 2016). Through this envisaged powerline, Morocco plans to export renewable energy to West Africa. Exports to the European Internal Market (a Roadmap to this end was signed at COP22) will travel via existing and planned submarine connections with Spain, Portugal and possibly with the UK. The latter would see a 3GW submarine cable between the UK and "the Sahara", which would generate energy to meet 6% of the UK's demand (Boulakhbar et al. 2020:8). The implications for the Saharawis' right to self-determination are huge. Aside from the financial benefits for Morocco, these planned energy exports would make not only Morocco, but also the European and West African energy markets partially dependent on energy generated in occupied Western Sahara. This manufactured dependence is politically charged. Following Klinger's (2017) observation on the power implications of rare earth mining, energy developments in occupied Western Sahara are about more than producing energy. They stake a colonial claim on a contested land and implicate foreign powers in this claim. That is, the Moroccan regime uses energy to recruit allies for its colonial project.

With regards to the Mauritanian connection, this would provide access to the African market (Boulakhbar et al. 2020:8). Energy is at the heart of Morocco's wider foreign policy in Africa. Morocco joined the African Union in 2017. The kingdom now seeks to augment its role in the African arena and uses the promise of energy as soft power (Bennis 2019; North Africa Post 2019). Morocco has modelled itself as "the African leader in the development of renewable energy in Africa" (Ngounou 2018). Simultaneously, it is planning a Nigeria-Morocco gas pipeline, which would connect all countries of the West African coast with Nigerian gas. This has softened Nigeria's pro-Polisario stance (North Africa Post 2019). ONEE, the Moroccan state's electricity and water company, has provided technical assistance and expertise for electrical infrastructure projects in Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Conakry, Cape Verde, Chad and Mali (ONEE 2016:2–3). Morocco's publication launched at COP22, "ONEE au Maroc et en Afrique", underlines the place of energy in realising the Kingdom's diplomatic efforts in securing support for its occupation in traditionally pro-Saharawi independence, pro-Polisario, sub-Saharan Africa (ONEE 2016). While the most widely-used definition of "energy diplomacy" is the use, by exporters, of foreign policy to secure energy markets abroad (Goldthau 2010), what we see in Morocco's case is the promise of future contributions to neighbouring regions' energy supply in return for recognition of its illegal occupation.

Renewable energy also does diplomatic work in support of Morocco's illegal occupation well beyond those countries who will benefit from energy exports. Morocco is routinely celebrated as a pioneer in the green energy transition. Fernandez Camporro (forthcoming) argues that King Mohammed VI uses renewable energy developments to greenwash his military occupation of Western Sahara on

the world stage. In international relations terms, Morocco's investments in renewable energy give the Kingdom a source of "soft power" allowing it to move closer to becoming a global player (Nye 2013). Whether energy in occupied Western Sahara is produced from renewable sources or fossil fuels makes little difference to the overall coloniality and oppressive nature of the energoregime. However, renewable energy has the advantage of casting a favourable light on Morocco due to the power of greenwashing discourses (Dunlap 2019; Fairhead et al. 2013).

By 2030, Morocco aims to source 52% of its energy from renewable sources through the Moroccan Solar Plan and the Morocco Integrated Wind Energy Programme (ONEE 2016:5). Solar plants in occupied Western Sahara will provide 30% of the total envisaged capacity of the Moroccan Solar Plan (WSRW 2016:23). Two wind farms in Western Sahara will provide half of the Wind Programme's projected capacity (WSRW 2020b). The territory is currently being surveyed in terms of its potential for generating geothermal energy (WSRW 2020a). Of five wind farms in occupied Western Sahara, four belong to the portfolio of the Moroccan King's energy company NAREVA, including the 50W Foum el Oued farm. Much like the ironic case of windfarms powering the highly contested (by the local population) Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in India (Kaur 2021:31), the Foum el Oued farm currently provides 100% of the energy needed to power the neighbouring Fosbucraa mine (OCP Group 2020:119), a key source of phosphates globally. The existing Aftissat wind farm is also used for industry. What we see, then, is a favouring of corporate clients in terms of energy provided by existing windfarms, as is also the case with large energy developments in Mozambique and South Africa (Power et al. 2016). Of solar infrastructure, the newest planned addition (to two existing sites) at the time of writing will be in Dakhla. The farm will be built adjacent to industrial greenhouses owned by the King, members of the makhzen, and French conglomerates (Africa Intelligence 2020). These greenhouses are responsible for draining underwater wells (vital for Saharawi nomads) on a huge scale.

As Raquel Ojeda García and Ángela Suárez Collado (2016) point out, Morocco invests in public infrastructure in Western Sahara to give legitimacy to its occupation. Morocco fetches out the old European trope of justifying colonialism by way of developing infrastructure for the helpless natives. A common refrain heard in the kingdom is: *Morocco is good, it develops its Southern Provinces*. Foreign energy companies replicate this narrative. There are hundreds of foreign businesses involved in the exploitation of occupied Western Sahara's natural resources. Some are more deeply implicated than others. Saharawis' corporate enemy number one is arguably Siemens because it is involved in all five wind developments in occupied Western Sahara. Siemens mirrors Morocco's discourse, using the colonial crutch of so-called development and modernity to excuse its activities. Says Siemens (2020) on its official "Siemens in Morocco" (Siemens ignores the existence of Western Sahara in its PR materials) web presence: "Morocco is getting ready for the future. With an extensive sustainable development plan that will make the country more energy self-reliant [sic]". It goes on: "Siemens is helping Morocco make the most of its own resources to produce, support and scale opportunities

from wind and solar farms to manufacturing to the sustainable development of vital infrastructure. That's Ingenuity [sic] for life".

Siemens' infrastructure arms the cables of power that grab Western Sahara for Morocco. As Jabary Salamanca (2011) highlights, energy grids play a crucial role in the discursive construction of a territory because they link places both politically and physically. Likewise, Siemens furthers Morocco's colonisation of Western Sahara in a material as well as discursive way. Thus, Moroccan energopolitics in Western Sahara rely on foreign corporate allies. We have also seen that energy plays a key diplomatic role for the Moroccan kingdom further illustrating how far energy, politics and the Moroccan ruling regime are tangled up in one energopolitical regime. This can be considered as oppressive because it, one, harms the Saharawi people by entrenching Moroccan military occupation on their land, and it, two, privileges another group, the Moroccan kingdom.

Power Outages, Prohibitive Costs, and Energy Non-Citizens

The power goes after dusk. Zrug and his wife stumble around the room grabbing for the hands of their children, fearing an accident with the tea stove.[1] Zrug carefully descends the staircase, squeezing the rail with one hand, holding the baby in the other. He keeps matches, candles and an oil lamp near the front door. This oil lamp "symbolises safety" for Zrug. Outside, his toddler clutches his mother's leg as other neighbours trickle out of their homes. They hold candles or oil lamps or the torchlight of smart phones. Says Zrug, too often "we fall into a state of chaos [when there's a power outage after dark] that risks the lives of our kids".

90 minutes later, down the road in Maatalla, the bulb ticks and the light flickers in Safia's living room. Safia sighs as the light comes back entirely. She heads to the bathroom to fill water bottles. It won't be long before the water cuts out again. Her brother Ali lies on his side on the carpet: "These cuts are usual in Maatalla and the other Saharawi suburbs but you can bet the settlers still have their showers". He implies that the regular water and electricity cuts are a deliberate form of collective punishment. We can understand this punishment as a gendered one, as erratic electricity and water supplies add hugely to the domestic workload, which belongs almost exclusively to women.[2] Mahmoud—Safia and Ali's father—lives nearby. He too experiences "frequent" (monthly) power cuts, usually for six hours or more each time. "As a nomad, these don't affect me"; he is used to life without electricity. But Mahmoud says the impact on his wife and the children that still live with him is considerable.

Mahmoud is 78. As a young man, the Spanish colonial administration employed him as a butcher. He hasn't been able to get a job since the Spanish left in 1975. Power cuts are "… frequent. They say they are due to problems in the grid, but we know that they sometimes cut the power on purpose when they want to bring secret things to the city, or when the young people protest in the streets". Fadel, a young political activist, sheds light on what Mahmoud may mean by "secret things". Says Fadel, blackouts coincide with Saharawi national days, Saharawi demonstrations, and "sometimes they cut [the power] if they

bring more soldiers and arms from the airport to the desert, to the berm, they don't want people or activists to know how many arms, tanks, and soldiers are entering". Hartan gives further insights:

> ... when there is a homecoming of Saharawi political detainees, Moroccan occupying authorities intentionally cut [the power] off in order to screw up the event ... I was personally able to see the suffering of media activists and this was when we were trapped during popular demonstrations in conjunction with UN envoy Christoph Ross' visit to occupied El Aaiún ... I noticed how their camera batteries had run out so they couldn't monitor the violations ...

Scholarship on energy and colonialism highlights the links between electricity, unequal access, inequalities and discrimination (Chikowero 2007; Winther 2008). With regards to settler colonialism, Jabary Salamanca (2011) argues that Israel employs infrastructural violence in Gaza by controlling and sanctioning Palestinian access to key infrastructure. Saharawis interpret a similar dynamic in occupied Western Sahara, alleging that their community's energy access is removed at Morocco's will, and often linked to pro-independence and/or anti-occupation activities. Morocco employs energopower to curtail performances of Saharawi nationalism.

Interviewees insisted that the districts with the highest population of ethnic Saharawis, Maatalla for example, are subject to more blackouts. Energy infrastructure mediates ethnic segregation. Electricity access has long been a tool for race-based socio-spatial differentiation. In the American South for example, governments developed electrical infrastructure that would institutionalise white supremacy (Harrison 2016). This pattern was reflected in European colonies, where white settlers had better access to infrastructural services (Baptista 2016:121). Since invading Western Sahara, Morocco has embarked on the settler colonial policy of moving its own population into Western Sahara. Moroccan settlers now greatly outnumber indigenous Saharawis. Comments such as Ali's above—"the settlers still have their showers"—reveal that infrastructure is understood as a tool, wielded by an oppressive colonial force, to differentiate the colonisers from "the natives".

Says Nguia: "At night, when the lights are out, violent confrontations erupt between Moroccan police and civilians. Therefore, power outages cause trouble for [the authorities]". According to Nguia, then, the energy companies avoid blackouts in order to avoid civil unrest. Dadi's view contradicts Nguia's. He finds that power outages are an orchestrated consequence, rather than a cause, of political unrest: "[a black out] happens for political reasons, for example because of late-night demonstrations". He recalls feeling "terrified" when, following demonstrations across El Aaiún upon the visit of the UN Envoy, police began raiding homes under the dark cover of a power outage. It is worth highlighting that for Dadi, Nguia and others, there is little distinction between the energy companies and the Moroccan regime security authorities. As Baptista (2016) points out, where a service provider is intimately associated with the state, the provider-user relationship is often understood as a proxy for state-society relations. Saharawis talk of energy providers and the Moroccan state's security services as if they were

one and the same: an energopolitical regime. Whether power outages happen to avoid confrontations, to quell political unrest or to hide human rights abuses from international observers, the energopolitical regime is understood as the agent behind them.

62-year-old Salka describes herself as an activist for peace. She puts power cuts in her home down to problems on the grid, or her inability to pay bills. She spends 50–60% of her monthly income on electricity bills. Meeting the energy and water bills is a great source of anxiety for her, and, she says, "for all Saharawis". When she fails to pay, the electricity is cut. She has also, on one occasion, had her meter removed, as have both Mohammed and Omar. Omar explains what happens if you fail to pay bills on time:

> After sending warning letters, the water and electricity companies will cut you off and taxes you double what you owe if you want to be reconnected. Then, if you still can't pay, they will remove your electric meter.

There was a general mistrust of suppliers on the part of interviewees. Several interviewees say they were being mischarged. Says Mahmoud: "they sometimes send us invoices with the wrong amounts. In our house we haven't a lot of machines, so we know how much energy we use". Najem and Najla share an anecdote of a time they spent away from home. Their usual monthly bill is 400-600 dirhams. Yet they were sent a bill for 1,000 dirhams for the month that the house was empty. They did not complain. Explained Najem: "we paid it because we can't do anything about this. Those who are in charge of bills in the electricity company are trying to steal money and there is no way to stop them".

Without exception, all interviewees in houses connected to the grid found their bills expensive. Of those interviewees that had a regular income, on average 30% of it was spent on electricity. All interviewees knew of families, notably those living in the slums of east El Aaiún, that did not have electricity in their homes. Several also mentioned families with low incomes that managed to "poach" electricity. Interviewees spoke of such families with no judgement. Eric Verdeil (2016:163–165), in his work on illegal hook-ups in Beirut, conceptualises similar poaching by Beirutis as a form of grid-embedded resistance at the "end of the line". Verdeil finds it is an individual rather than collective form of dissent that is not necessarily connected to any wider political demands. Silver (2014) notes a similar practice in poor areas of urban Accra. He conceptualises these practices as "clandestine connections" and suggests they may be read as "the material articulation of a future with lower tariffs or even free energy for marginalised communities, an attempt by the neighbourhood not just to envisage but to actually bring about a future of more equitable energy access" (Silver 2014:795). Silver, then, allows the possibility to think of "illegal" hook ups as collective resistance, not just individual dissent. Returning to Verdeil (2016), and following his reading of Asef Bayat, "illegal" hook-ups show how the politics of Saharawi energy poverty are fought in the "back alleyways" of the poorest neighbourhoods. But not only there. Town squares, wide avenues and the city's main thoroughfares have seen street protests concerning the high cost of electricity and water, bringing dissent into the public sphere. Explains Zrug:

> We are in 2019 and in a few days, we will be in 2020. I know many who do not have electricity at home. A lot of companies have launched big projects of energy power and, not far from these projects, people in El Aaiún are living without electricity … There was a protest in Al Matara neighbourhood concerning the energy and water outages …

We see that the high cost of electricity makes it an exclusive resource. But it excludes poor Saharawis from more than just reliable energy access. Lemanski (2020) argues that people's everyday access to public infrastructure affects their citizenship identities. Failing infrastructure therefore constitutes a breakdown in state-citizen relationships. If we read energy infrastructure as a physical manifestation of (as Lemanski does with public infrastructure in the South African case) Morocco's citizenship model, then excluding Saharawis from energy access only fosters their disassociation with the Moroccan state. While an energopolitical regime seeks to govern population and shape subjectivities, the oppressive nature of the energopolitical regime in Western Sahara produces subjects hostile to itself. In other words, we suggest that the energopolitical regime has attempted to "develop infrastructure in the Southern Provinces" to, at least outwardly (in reality, infrastructural developments follow their traditional colonial purpose of facilitating capitalist wealth-gathering and removal) serve Saharawis and integrate them into the wider Moroccan nation by way of offering "development", "modernisation", and "infrastructure" (we refer back to the aforementioned common refrain "Morocco is good, it develops its Southern Provinces") but has achieved the opposite. As energy infrastructure removes the border between Western Sahara and Morocco, it simultaneously bolsters the border between Morocco and the Saharawi Republic in Saharawi hearts and minds.

The Visibility of the Energopolitical Regime and Bodily Violence

Researchers working on perceptions of energy often comment that people do not think about energy except during power outages (Chapman et al. 2013; Rupp 2013). Energy is mystified. People consume it in great quantities with no awareness of its providence or how it reaches them. In this section, we join other scholars working on African contexts such as Silver (2014) in finding that contrary to the body of research that finds energy to be invisible until it is absent in the Global North, in Western Sahara energy is "visible" to Saharawis in the sense that it is perceived as a dangerous mediator of oppressive politics whether materially present or absent. Saharawis living in occupied Western Sahara interpret energy—its providence, its use, its cost in the widest sense of the word—in intensely political ways. A power outage is not needed to provoke thought or debate about energy. We argue that this is precisely because of the presence of an oppressive energopolitical regime in occupied Western Sahara. To make this argument, we below highlight Saharawi *perceptions* of energy infrastructure: who they believe is behind energy infrastructure in occupied Western Sahara, the various political meanings that energy infrastructure constitutes for Saharawis, and the (physical)

oppression and violence they (believe they will) face if they dare to publicly question the energopolitical regime. We continue with Zrug's story.

Zrug's case is exceptional because he is the only Saharawi that any of us have met that has benefited from a job in the energy industry. Zrug is passionate about looking after the environment. He is currently unemployed. Ideally, he would make a living by working in the field of sustainable development. He has so far been only partially successful in this aspiration: Zrug has worked for day wages for a solar thermal company, but before that also for Geofizyka Kraków, a Polish company providing seismic data on hydrocarbons. He describes his experiences of working for energy companies as "exploitative". He would work, on average, 13 hours a day and says he was paid the equivalent of one euro an hour.

Before these jobs, Zrug had thought that energy used in occupied Western Sahara arrived from Morocco via transmission lines. But, through his work, he saw solar installations in Dchiera village, near El Aaiún, wind turbines near Dora and Tah villages, a wind farm outside Boujdour, and oil drilling near Bou Craa. Now he knows that Western Sahara generates and exports energy. And he also learnt who profited from his exploitation: "Energy is managed and owned by multinational companies and individuals like the king of Morocco … There are multiple companies that generate energy in Western Sahara while we are paying it from our wallets and this is nonsense".

Although Zrug is at pains to emphasise that these renewable energy developments are illegal because the Polisario does not consent to them, energy poverty is the most important factor for Zrug:

> Wind farms and so on are making the poor poorer and the rich richer. Green energy is being exported out of Western Sahara to other places in Africa and elsewhere. Although this is illegal because it is done by the Moroccan occupation, I feel proud as many elsewhere will be able to use electricity for lighting and other activities. They need electricity, just as I do. I am in favour of benefits for people everywhere and I can compromise my rights for them to produce light for poor people but under one condition: it has to be for free and not for sale.

Zrug knows that his condition is not met. Even his own parents are not connected to the grid. They rely on candles for light. His father is over 90 and Zrug worries for them. Ironically, they live between the energy developments at Dcheira village and the Siemens wind farm at Bou Craa phosphate mine.

Zrug's indignation at the unequal distribution of energy wealth pushed him to protest. A banner hangs from his house reading, "stop the plundering of Western Sahara's natural resources". He also recently participated in a 52-day sit-in in Mecca Street, El Aaiún, demanding jobs for Saharawis, and another lasting 29 days at the Guerguerat buffer zone (Saharawi civilians had intermittently been setting up roadblocks and other forms of protest at Guerguerat since 2016, well before the November 2020 outbreak of war, which occurred at Guerguerat). The latter protested illegal exploitation of Saharawis' natural resources. Zrug has since ceased his protesting activities. After Guerguerat, he hustled some part-time work as a bus driver. But, he says, Moroccan authorities got him sacked. He is also

banned from travelling outside of Aaiún. Zrug fears for the wellbeing of his children, wife and parents: "no one will feed them if [the authorities] take me".

No interviewees had been invited to take part in any consultation process on energy developments. All interviewees were likewise unanimous in their view that these energy developments held no benefits for Saharawis and that the benefits of natural resource exploitation go to Moroccans—mostly wealthy settlers and ex-high-ranking military personnel and government members—and a small minority of wealthy Saharawi families with close ties to the Moroccan authorities. This is reflected in research that focuses on other areas of natural resource exploitation (ODHE 2019). Energy infrastructure is understood as (and indeed is) funding the patronage networks that maintain elite allegiance to the Moroccan occupation and king.

Interviewees expressed positive views towards renewable energy in general, but none had positive opinions of the renewable energy developments in occupied Western Sahara. We asked if they knew who was responsible for the developments. Nguia believe it was a "foreign" company called Siemens, which has "no humanity". She adds, "the occupying power is letting other countries invest here as a way of getting them to recognise Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara". Messbah expects that most developments would be the result of partnerships between French companies and the Moroccan king.

Hartan has heard of Kosmos Energy. Dadi, too, has heard that Kosmos is active in the region, as well as San Leon. He opines, "these companies contribute to Moroccan colonisation and endlessly support its presence". Dadi, Hartan and Ahmed collaborated to create news articles about an event held in El Aaiún on the Noor 1 (Dchiera, near El Aaiún) solar project, to which Saharawis were not invited. In retribution, Ahmed, who is a university student in Morocco, had his study and travel grants pulled, and Moroccan authorities also cancelled social benefits received by his relatives.

Salka knows about solar energy projects in El Aaiún port and Tarfaya, but she is not aware of the names of any companies involved in these developments. She comments: "All profits go to the Moroccan occupation and foreign companies". She has never publicly protested against these energy developments because she is afraid of violent repression. Like Nguia, Omar and Mohammed voice their desire to demonstrate against the energy companies present in their country but they are too afraid to do so.

Mahjoub is a fisherman. He does not identify as an activist. He knows of solar and wind farms at Tarfaya and El Aaiún port. He believes them to be owned by the king, but knows that Siemens is also involved. Does Mahjoub like the look of wind turbines? What do they represent for him aesthetically? Mahjoub giggles and remarks, "They do not represent anything but a scene of the wind of your land being illegally exploited by the invaders with no benefits for the people".

As for Fadel, he comments: "I know Siemens and the Moroccan Royal Holding and others, they support this occupation and give Morocco reasons to continue the occupation". He says he has participated in a peaceful protest against such energy companies and was beaten by Moroccan authorities for doing so. Mahmoud does not know what green energy is. He has seen a wind turbine though.

He describes it as "a machine or tool made to steal our resources and say we benefit from it".

Zain is a student. He does not identify as an activist. He knows of wind farms at Boujdour, Tarfaya and Dakhla, and of a solar thermal project at Dchiera. When asked if he knows who manages these renewable energy developments, he replies, in a whisper: "Can I say the word occupation?" When reassured, he goes on to talk of four Saharawi families in Tarfaya (Tarfaya is in Morocco proper, but was historically roamed by Saharawi nomads) whose land—Zain alleges—was confiscated, with no compensation, to make way for the Siemens developments there. WSRW has reported on one such family in Tarfaya (WSRW 2013), as well as the case of an El Aaiún family who lost their home (and whose members were beaten and arrested when they refused to leave the house) to make way for an Alstom-constructed power line (WSRW 2014).

Salem does not see himself as an activist. He feels energy developments in occupied Western Sahara cause his people suffering. He says, "the consultation about such projects is always only with well-known individuals and they negotiate deals. Ordinary people are not consulted". In the past, Salem has emailed foreign energy companies to urge them to divest from his country. He received no replies. He also attended a demonstration against the solar developments, but was beaten there by police.

Interviewees' views of the developments and the developers was uniformly negative because they "fuel Moroccan colonialism and occupation". That several interviewees named the Moroccan king as behind energy developments is significant given, following Baptista (2016), that where infrastructure is associated with the state it is often understood as a proxy for state-society relations. That Saharawis identified developers as "foreign multinationals" emphasises the perceived coloniality of the energoregime. If we argued in the former section that energy supply issues and prohibitively high energy costs foster an "othering" of Saharawis and thereby a rejection, on their part, of Moroccan citizenship, in this section we see that renewable energy developments are met with disdain largely on Saharawi nationalist grounds: the developers and developments are *colonial*, they further the *occupation*. The oppressive energopolitical regime fuels a Saharawi identity, and with it, resistance. Beatings, job losses, benefits cuts, threats to relatives and travel bans are the lot of those interviewees who have occasionally denounced the hated foreign energy developers. This violence is indicative of a situation of climate necropolitics (DeBoom 2021; Mbembe 2003): Saharawis face violence in the name of climate change mitigation. We purposefully sought interviews with Saharawis that did not consider themselves activists, or who were low-profile activists, in order to gage the views of "ordinary" Saharawis. If we turn, though, to the retributions suffered by those who dedicate their lives to struggling against resource plunder, we get a sense of the cruelty, degradation and brutal violence that allow us to qualify (according to the definition explored at the outset of this paper) the energopolitical regime in Western Sahara as one of authoritarian oppression.

Sultana Khaya, President of the Saharawi League for Human Rights and Natural Resources, has led several protests against specific energy companies, as well as in

favour of Saharawi human rights. The Moroccan police's punishment for her was to remove one of her eyes (Allan 2016). To understand the fate of the president of the other Saharawi organisation fighting plunder in the occupied territory, the Committee for the Protection of Natural Resources in Western Sahara (CSPRON), we should look back ten years.

On 25 December 2010, police pick up Sidahmed Lemjeyid and Izana Amidan together. Izana is a high-profile human rights activist. Sidahmed, before his arrest, had dedicated all his time to his role as President of CSPRON. This is an unofficial, unpaid role, because Saharawi organisations that work to denounce activities such as San Leon's oil exploration surveys or Siemens wind farms are not allowed to register or officially exist.

Allan (2019) writes elsewhere about what happened to Izana after her arrest. In brief, police put her in a cell in a secret detention centre and subject her to sexual violence and torture for three days before releasing her without charge. Sidahmed is also put in a cell—he does not know where it is—and is tortured, raped and made to sign a confession. The next day, his case is referred to Rabat's military court (Moe 2017:258). He spends the next three years being tortured in cells in El Aaiún, Dakhla and Sale.[3]

In February 2013, Sidahmed stands up in court. He faces trial alongside 23 of his compatriots on trumped up charges linked to the 2010 Gdeim Izik Saharawi protest, which was a month-long encampment of 20,000 Saharawis demanding jobs, independence and an end to natural resource plunder. Sidahmed wears a blue *derrah* and hangs a green turban around his neck. Scars are visible on his hands and head. Someone is taking photographs. He looks at the camera and makes the peace sign. They all do. The defendants give their statements. Sidahmed quotes, in his defence, the 2002 UN Legal Opinion on oil exploration activities in Western Sahara:

> … if further exploration and exploitation activities were to proceed in disregard of the interests and wishes of the people of Western Sahara, they would be in violation of the principles of international law applicable to mineral resource activities in Non-Self-Governing Territories. (Corell 2002)

On sentencing day, there are power outages in El Aaiún. Saharawis say the Moroccan authorities have arranged for the blackout. Without electricity, it will take longer for the Saharawi community to learn the fates of their Gdeim Izik heroes, and it will be harder to coordinate large demonstrations. Slowly, the news perforates the El Aaiún darkness: Sidahmed is sentenced to life imprisonment.

Three years on, Sidahmed and his compatriots are brought before Sale Civilian Appeals Court. In the court room, they stand in a glass cage. The trial lasts seven months. Some days, the defendants come in bloody, even wrapped in blankets. They claim to have been tortured on court premises, including in the presence of the judge. On days that they are unable to stand up, they must sit in an adjacent room, where they cannot hear proceedings. On 21 March 2017, Sidahmed gives his declaration. He mentions a phrase that he has been forced to utter whilst being tortured. It's a phrase that mocks his work: "Morocco is good, it develops its Southern Provinces" (Moe 2017:258).

On the last day, the court delivers the sentence in minutes (Moe 2017:34). Sidahmed is sentenced to life imprisonment.

Conclusion

Engaging with Boyer's concept of energopower as a means to discipline citizens and foster subjectivities, this article has conceptualised the Moroccan energy system in occupied Western Sahara as an oppressive, colonial energoregime. We have furthered discussions on energy, politics, colonialism and citizenship by focusing on indigenous voices and lived experiences, arguing that a colonial, oppressive energoregime inadvertently produces citizens hostile to itself. Saharawis living in the occupied territory are aware, eyes wide open, that energy infrastructure—its ownership, its management, its reach, the terms of its access, the political and diplomatic work it does—mediates the power of the Moroccan occupation and its corporate partners. The Moroccan occupation enters into, and shapes the possibilities of, daily life in the Saharawi home through (the lack of) electricity cables. Saharawis understand power cuts as a method through which the occupying regime punishes them as a community, fosters ignorance of Moroccan military manoeuvres, combats celebrations of Saharawi national identity, enforces a media blockade so that news from Western Sahara does not reach "the outside world" and creates regular dangers in their family homes. Thousands of Saharawis lack the funds to pay for grid energy. Some, through pirate hookups, manage to opportunistically exploit vulnerable points in the grid to their own advantage, which, following Verdeil (2016), can be read as individually-voiced forms of redress or, following Silver (2014), can be understood as a collective call for free energy for the marginalised. With regards to those Saharawis whose homes are connected to the grid legally, access does not mean liberal use. Costs are prohibitively high, which has led to public protests. Discrimination along ethnic lines, which means that jobs in the energy industry are almost exclusively for Moroccan settlers, has also resulted in protests.

For Saharawis, energy justice is inextricably linked with self-determination. Energy providers, closely linked to the Moroccan state and king, are (seen as) a proxy for the Moroccan occupation in its entirety. Foreign energy developers are despised because they are perceived as agents of colonialism and occupation. Saharawis' everyday engagements with energy mediate their critical positionality vis-a-vis the Moroccan regime and their conditionality as an occupied people. If we follow Baptista (2016) and Lemanski (2020) and read these interactions with energy infrastructures as a mediator of citizenship, we can argue that the energopolitical regime fosters a rejection of Moroccan citizenship whilst simultaneously fuelling Saharawi nationalist demands. The oppressive nature of the energopolitical regime produces resistance to itself.

For a Saharawi in the occupied territory, to contradict the logics of the energopolitical regime by protesting against the foreign energy companies that support and form it is to risk economic dispossession and bodily violence. For repeat offenders like Sidahmed Lemjeyid, it also means life imprisonment. In the prison cells, the energopolitical regime's electricity flows through the tortured body.

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Endnotes

[1] All first names indicate pseudonyms for interviewees.

[2] Enloe (2010) has made this observation with regards to the situation of women living in Iraq during the US invasion. For more on the gendered implications of infrastructural failures, see Lawhon et al. (2018).

[3] The report by Associação de Cooperação e Solidariedade Entre os Povos (ACOSOP) is published in Moe (2017:250–265).

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